

inspiration, medium, theorist, translator, life partner, companion, and true love—makes everything better. She and my daughter, Luna, sustain my belief that my own struggles are worthwhile. In a weird way and unbeknownst to them, the New People's Army made this book possible. But all its flaws—and there are many—belong to me.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Visual Transformations in Philippine Modernity: Notes toward an Investigation of the World-Media System*

#### *Capital Mediation*

Whosoever believes that there is such a thing as global capitalism necessarily also believes there is already in place a global media system: for what is capital if not a vast network of coordinated and leveraged mediations? Perhaps, the twentieth century shall one day be reckoned as the period when capital went from being just one form of mediation among many to being the ur-medium, cannibalizing (and thus, iterating) nearly all other media from the cognitive, to the cultural, to the psychological, to the visceral, to the televisual, to the digital.<sup>1</sup> Film, television, computing, and even architecture become functional extensions of capitalism. Such an event, if one can call a shift in the mode of production by that term, has tremendous consequences for the nature and function of visibility.

Although this project is primarily a study of the trajectory of Philippine abstraction in painting and in film, my subject matter

and the claims I make about it are in no way separable from Philippine history and, thus, from the history of Spanish conquest, U.S. imperialism, and the expansion and globalization of capital. My investigation explores the overdeterminations (that is, the delimitations of historical possibility) generated by colonial and imperial powers in both their cultural and economic dimensions and, at least as important, the vigorous Filipino efforts to transform these vectors of belittling, exploitative, and violent domination. Central to the overall form of this work is my claim regarding a generalized economization of the so-called cultural elements of life, that is, of cultural being/participation. In brief, what was formerly known as "Culture" (what the elite has) and then "culture(s)" (in the anthropological sense) has, under the capitalism of the twentieth century, been increasingly captured by the economic and made to function as an economic, more specifically, capitalist, mediation. Commodification has penetrated interstitial human spaces to the very viscera and thus, today, society (as thought and engineered by the global ruling classes) is largely composed of integrated machines to organize and coordinate these ever-expanding, ever-more-deeply penetrating cybernetic processes.

Culture, then, has been recast and reprogrammed by the acculturated who, at every level of the socius, labor under the heliotropism of capital and its leveraged exchange. This capitalization of action, thought, the unconscious, and desire, among other biosocial functions, is otherwise known as commodification. Its widespread practice implies that a political economy of culture is now possible. We are at least aware that the tremendous infusion of capital into the cinema, television, and Internet must have payoff for the investors, and we are also aware that media corporations, the military-industrial complex, and governments intertwine. But are we aware that while interfaced in that cybernetic relation, known as the image, we also produce and reproduce the world and ourselves along with it?

Perhaps in the Philippines, the political economy of culture can be most clearly grasped in its historical formation during the

period when the visual has become the new arena of operations for media capital. Thus, abstract art is here understood as a response to the condition put forth in a Fredric Jameson axiom: "We can think abstractly about the world only to the extent that the world itself has already become abstract."<sup>2</sup>

Jameson's riff on Karl Marx's proof of the material determination of consciousness implies that abstract art indexes the becoming-abstract of the world as the becoming-abstract of the visual. Furthermore, the very process of abstraction—its encroachment upon and rearticulation of the visual realm—can be grasped as if from a subaltern perspective in the abstraction produced in the visual art of an imperialized nation such as the Philippines. Clearly, this thesis opens up a new set of possibilities for analyzing Filipino abstract painting and its consequences, even as it is fraught with risk. It also suggests a reconsideration of cinema's role, both in the Philippines and globally, because cinema may be understood fundamentally as a medium of abstraction. Finally, this thesis regarding the becoming-abstract of the visual suggests a new set of insights into the accompanying problematics of modernization and modernity. But to say that part of the work of Philippine visual modernism is to bring about a new era of abstraction is to transcode it—to put language on images—and this transcodification is a risky hermeneutical act, one that the active, judging reader must inevitably evaluate.

Thus, my aim in *Acquiring Eyes* is to elaborate from a subaltern perspective the processes of the generalized subsumption of culture, and particularly of visual culture, by the economic sphere. In the course of such an elaboration, I would attach my own creative effort in tracking the formal shifts of a culture in capital to the radical counterhegemonic elements informing many of the Filipino cultural endeavors that I have been fortunate enough to study and thus to participate in. The twentieth-century emergence of the visual can be grasped in two moments that are dialectically separable—first, as a realm of freedom and, second, subsequently as an arena of expropriation. This movement in the visual is one of the

most significant zones of the unthought of political economy and geopolitics. Without understanding the history of visibility, the most basic insights into political economy and social organization will remain tragically inadequate. In practice, the Right has already put culture at the forefront of its political aims. The "free market" has made possible the accessing of bodies by commercials, objects, and desires that are designed to capture people's struggles for survival and to capitalize on these. Thus, the Left needs to revamp its cultural program. As my work attempts to demonstrate, the operation of a capital logic in restructuring the seemingly unmediated plenitude that is the visual opens new sites for the contestation of the racist, patriarchal, and imperialist violence endemic to capitalism that today has rendered "little brown brothers" and sisters as diasporic service providers for members of the ruling class. We shall explore several modes of engagement and struggle striving to eventually surpass hierarchical society by economic democracy, that is (or would be), by socialism.

In turning to Filipino artists for guidance and inspiration in the contestation of global capital, I am implicitly also making an argument for the centrality of the Philippines and other Third World formations in launching any counternarrative to "the triumph of global capital" and its oft-unspoken yet "inevitable" and, therefore, officially justifiable damning of the majority to impoverished off-screen oblivion.<sup>3</sup> The number of people on planet Earth who live in "extreme poverty," defined at \$1 per day, is more than one billion. If the dollar amount used to index "extreme poverty" is moved to \$2 then the number of people in that category is greater than 2 billion. Globalization, as the latest form of capitalism is currently called—whether understood as analytic conceit, imaginative fantasy, accumulation regime, or computational algorithm has been, is being, and will be contested through the various forms of agency of its expropriated producers. This agency of producers, the people, and their artists—whether sealed in the commodities you buy, silenced through military force, or displaced from view by media spectacles—

is oftentimes rendered invisible. Yet the agency of the silenced and disappeared is no less necessary to maintain the wealth of the world. Therefore, it is the agency of the producers that sustains the alienated and alienating consciousness of the planet. The extraction of value out of workers, soldiers, slaves, and out of *spectators* accumulates as wealth, that is, capital, to bolster the ever-increasing leverage of the world's masters.<sup>4</sup>

What I call the world-media system is the auto-poetic institution of globalization, whose most visible conceptual product is the conceit of "Globalization" itself and all that follows from it. Thus, the world-media system would name the means by which globalization speaks itself in and through all of us, "each according to their (its) abilities, each according to their (its) needs." In an ironic fulfillment of Marx's prophecy from his early writings, many of us do exactly what we want and receive exactly what we deserve. However, what we "want" is what capital tells us (as its logic is embodied by us) and what we "deserve" is what the market pays. When human freedom has been overtaken by the world market and choice is possible only within the narrow parameters of a murderous, totalitarian world system, then one cannot help think of aesthetics in the terms of aesthetics under fascism as described by Walter Benjamin: We consume our own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the highest order.<sup>5</sup> In short, under globalization, humanity is enjoined to produce its own nonexistence.

First theorized by Marx as capital, the world-media system was perhaps initially apprehended as media per se, by Guy Debord, who formalized the mediological paradigm under the category of the "spectacle." As "the accumulation of capital, to the extent that it becomes an image," and again as "the diplomatic presentation of hierarchical society to itself," the spectacle is not just a mere relation but a relation of production and, hence, a consciousness-producing relation that produces material organization. The spectacle coordinates the production of consciousness with the production of commodities and, therefore, with the production of capital. The



world-media system names the organizational protocols that simultaneously structure culture and economy. It names the cofunctioning, conflation and, indeed, sublation of the logistics of material practices and of consciousness by the logistics of capital. Its machines of organization and accumulation penetrate government, television, mind, body, self, and utterance. They engineer perception, desire, speech, possibility, and what passes for "reality." In short, they are the dominant network of abstractions that would organize all social processes in the service of capital.

### Neorealism

There are three key historical moments in *Acquiring Eyes*, the first marked most dramatically by the Second World War and National Artist H. R. Ocampo's shift in the late 1940s from Social Realism (fig. 1) to Abstraction (fig. 2). A bartender, prisoner of war, novelist, short-story writer, newspaper editor, radio playwright and filmmaker, and reportedly a member of the people's movement Hukbalahap, Ocampo went from producing a Social Realist art identified with an agrarian proletariat to an art of biomorphic forms and symphonic colors. The Social Realist works of the 1930s and 1940s were done in both literary and visual media, while the great abstractions that made Ocampo famous were done in paint. It is important not to read this change, as has been done before, as merely a conservative move on the part of Ocampo, a forsaking of the possibilities of popular struggle.<sup>6</sup> Such a reading would condemn Philippine modernism to being irrelevant or, worse, in the continuing struggle for decolonization. This dismissal of modernism misses the transformations not only of the aesthetic register but also of the sensorium of modern subjects, transformations, I would argue, that are the building blocks of the future revolution. Therefore, to underscore that the dramatic shift in Ocampo's approach to creation occurred because of a transformation in the character of visibility itself, I argue that there occurs after the Second World War a historicocultural

foreclosure of certain modes of struggle possible, or at least viable, in the linguistic realm, and that this foreclosure is accompanied by a new historical role for the visual. Put another way, certain aspects of nationalist struggle that were no longer possible narratively became possible visually. It is certainly true that in the 1960s, Philippine literature in Tagalog also turned to innovations in both form and content, as part of the ferment of nationalist struggle. While I am unable to do this here, an important direction for future research would be an analysis of the relations between modernism in Tagalog literature and modernism in Philippine visual art. It is also true, however, that Philippine writing in English was—by then and with a few exceptions—viewed by scholars on the Left as all but moribund.<sup>7</sup> This foreclosure of narrative modes of struggle, particularly in writing in English, can be clearly viewed in the turn in Ocampo's creative career. The fundamental shift in his work from Social Realism to Abstraction follows deep structural changes in two separate but initially related institutions, namely the visual and language. The ability of "visuality" and language to have purchase on and thus to structure reality shifts radically during the course of Ocampo's career. For reasons I elaborate on below, this formative movement can be understood in the shift from social realism to abstraction in Philippine painting. Abstract art is here understood not as a mere set of formal innovations but rather as an index of and intervention in a set of shifting social conditions. The first section of this book examines Ocampo's work, its shifts and aspirations, in depth.

The emergence of literary realism in the 1930s marked a preliminary shift in what might be thought of as the structure of the Real and its modes of representation. In *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel: A Generic Study of the Novel until 1940*, Resil B. Mojares cites the periodization provided by Salvador P. Lopez regarding the development of what Lopez calls Socialist Realism in the Philippines:

Lopez outlines the stages of Filipino literature in English, thus: The first period, from 1915 to 1925, was "the period of gram-

mar and rhetoric"; the second period, from 1925 to 1933, was a period in which the concern progressed to "expression," that is, style and technique. The third period, he says, which began in 1933, was one in which the writers' main preoccupation was no longer the mechanics of language or literary technique but the concrete social experience of the people. As Lopez expresses this post-1933 development: "Filipino writers have acquired *eyes*." [Italics in original]<sup>8</sup>

Mojares continues:

It was then that the theory of socialist realism arose. It was undoubtedly at the outset flawed in conception and execution. Its development was also "suspended" by the Pacific War, which found many writers unprepared and left them confused and dazed.<sup>9</sup>

In representing "the concrete social experience of the people," this period of socialist realism strives to render the particular general and thus functions by rendering the concrete abstract. It begins in the early 1930s and comes to a provisional close just after the Second World War. After a period of decline, during which abstract painting came to the fore, Socialist Realism became relevant again, and in a new way, during the late 1960s and through the martial law period (1972–1986). By and large, this first moment of Socialist Realism (1933–1945) corresponds with the first realist period of Philippine painting. If, as we are told, by the mid-1930s, "Filipino writers have acquired *eyes*," one cannot help but wonder what they needed them for. In part, I venture, they were needed because the concrete materials of everyday life were becoming abstract—shot through with the vectors of alien social forces. Through a reading of H. R. Ocampo's realist fiction, I will argue in detail that the interest in concrete experience and the acquiring of eyes (i.e., of a visual register of experience) has everything to do with the concrete be-

coming abstract. That is, lived experience comes to be seen as having a logic that exceeds the parameters of individual life and is informed by larger structural changes. I will examine closely the emerging significance of this organ, the eye, and of the historical forces that organized it. As a writer of Socialist-Realist fiction before the war, H. R. Ocampo is a convenient starting point since he often thematized the event of vision in his works as well as transcoded its processes. In his stories, what can be seen rises up, antithetically as it were, to what can be told and warps the telling almost beyond narratibility. Later, after the war, visuality almost entirely overtakes Ocampo's artwork.

The trauma of the interimperialist conflict between the U.S. and Japan during the Second World War effected an overall restructuring not only of how the Philippines thought of itself as a nation, but how it organized itself at almost every level, from the sociological, to the economic, to the perceptual. To assert the existence of this transition is not to claim that there existed in the Philippines a unitary discourse about the nation or a unified imaginary with respect to its future. Neither can one speak of a unified set of practices that characterizes "The Philippines" after the Second World War. However, one can note a sea change of a sort, a global shift in the modes of social organization and of thought, which necessitated shifts in the strategies by which competing interests pursued their aims.

For example, let us look at another layer of the conceptualization of social process. Luis Taruc, one of the leaders of the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Magbubukid (PKM), or National Peasants Union that developed out of the agrarian resistance movement Hukbalahap, wrote that, "the contrast between the prewar and postwar forms of mass organization was a good indication of how the metal of our movement had been tempered in the heat of the war. The haphazard and rather uncoordinated methods of the Aguman ding Malding Talapagobra (AMT), or General Workers Union, were replaced by the smooth-running committees that had division of labor and that sought to involve their memberships."<sup>10</sup>

After the war, the PKM pursued its propeasant, antifeudalist/anticapitalist aims through legal as well as electoral channels. It became clear to the PKM that its interests required the concerted coordination of disparate forces working on a variety of fronts to arrive at tangible results. Events and strategies became ever more complex and interlocked; protest actions became at once specialized and integrated. While such bureaucraticization was dismissed during the reformation of the Communist Party in the 1960s, we should not overlook the changes in the concrete social situation that it, along with abstraction itself, implied. Causality was multileveled and required a similar organization of social struggle.

For example, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) founded on 26 August 1930, the anniversary of the "Cry of Balintawak" that triggered the revolution against Spain in 1896, coordinated the PKM, the Committee on Labor Organizations (CLO), and the Democratic Alliance (DA), the last of which, a neophyte political party, succeeded in electing six members to Congress. However, "no sooner had these peasant-backed DA congressmen [including Taruc] been elected than they were prevented from taking their seats in Congress on the opening day of its regular session in May 1946."<sup>11</sup> This ouster, presumably over election irregularities, finally reached the Supreme Court. "After a protracted deliberation on the case, the high tribunal came out with the following findings: The ejection of the minority senators and congressmen had nothing to do with the alleged commission of fraud and terrorism but with the 'parity' issue, that is, whether or not American citizens should be granted parity, or equal rights, as Filipinos in the exploitation and development of Philippine natural resources and in the operation of public utilities [those ousted were known to be antiparity and thus anti-imperialist]."<sup>12</sup> Understandably, the ouster of the DA representatives disgruntled the peasantry of Central Luzon, many of whom were former Huks. Along with the top PKM leaders Mateo del Castillo and Juan Feleo, Taruc agreed to mediate between the government and the peasantry. Feleo ended up being murdered,

which provoked Taruc to issue the following "ultimatum" to Roxas: "The supreme test of your power has come. In your hands rests the destiny of our miserable people and our motherland. Yours is the power now to plunge them into chaos and horrible strife, or pacify and unite them as brothers in liberty."<sup>13</sup>

Words, inadequate as they were, gave over to warfare and Taruc returned to Central Luzon where fighting between the Huk and government forces resumed. The entire span of the social—from grass roots to elected office, from peasant land reform to property rights of U.S. corporations, from warfare and assassinations to mediation and ultimatums—was effectively seen as comprising scenes of struggle. Although struggle certainly permeated every aspect of life under Spanish colonial rule, the normalization of national life under the U.S. Commonwealth pushed radical struggle into ever-receding spaces of marginalization, such as the seditious plays and millenarian peasant revolts.<sup>14</sup> In other words, hegemony or public consensus took hold of postwar life in ways that it did not under Spanish rule. Particularly during the period of neocolonialism, after the U.S. granted formal independence to the Philippines, the sites under the sway of hegemony only increased. Every aspect of social life was increasingly understood as implicated in an overriding social logic and, therefore, in the generalized struggle for social liberation. Furthermore, as we might observe today, forms of sociality were beginning to be conceived as the media of struggle. Ocampo, for example, shows in his novel how a grade-school contest over the correct use of an English word is part, and indeed process, of the vertiginous dynamic of colonization.

Generally speaking, in both the levels of politics and aesthetics, people grasped the object of struggle, that is, "the objective" in both senses of the word (the "goal" and the "nonsubjective") not as existentially immutable but as conditioned by an assemblage of forces. Some of these forces were visceral, some political, some ideological, some violent, and some bureaucratic, among others. While the precise terms of conceptualization employed by this analysis were not



available at the time of these events, this inchoate trends were emergent. The objective had to constitute itself on shifting terrain.

We should note that the struggle for the objective of national liberation spanned the distance from U.S. military aid and industrial capital to communist nationalists in the plains of Luzon, and influencing everything in between. This objective of national liberation and its antithesis—that of unbridled profit taking by the U.S. and its conscripted class of compradors—was going to draw the subjectivity of nearly everyone in the Philippines into its warp in ways both conscious and unconscious. As Ocampo's oeuvre testifies, in the process the narration of reality in a manner adequate to real conditions underwent a tremendous crisis of inadequacy, which catapulted the visual into a new role.<sup>15</sup>

Not only Filipinos were drawn into the warp of the historical struggle between labor and capital, nationalist struggle and imperialism. The same is true for U.S. citizens, most of whom were and remain the direct beneficiaries of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines, whether they know it or not. Thus, the Philippines (and much of the Third World) is, in many respects, part of the unconscious of the U.S. empire. This claim is not a casual observation but rather, would link psychic processes to geopolitical formations. Geopolitical processes inform what Jameson calls "the political unconscious" and thus, structure not only aesthetic and social form but also consciousness, language function, and perception. In historicizing such phenomenon, we restore an awareness of the geopolitical conditions of possibility to the phenomenological. This historicization consciously politicizes cultural events that are always already politically effected. This analytic strategy is part of the critique of reification, in which objects such as commodities or artworks or, for that matter, identities, are shown to be instances of social process and contestation, a strategy utilized in various ways by Filipino revolutionaries and artists. During the period under study, revolutionary objectives demand the dismantling of the epistemologically objective, that is, so-called objective reality. Objective reality was effectively

grasped as a mode of domination and thus, a scene of contestation. This book intends to assemble language adequate to the analysis of the geopolitically driven shifts in perceptual faculties and aesthetic form. In short, it seeks to historicize three moments of abstraction in the Philippines: Neorealism, Socialist Realism, and what I would tentatively call Syncretic Realism.

In giving the brief account above of the Philippine Left's political analysis of what might be called "the logistics of the Real" in the 1930s, I have drawn on Francisco Nemenzo's "An Irrepressible Revolution: The Decline and Resurgence of the Philippine Communist Movement."<sup>16</sup> His main thesis is that contrary to received wisdom, the PKP was not an internationalist but was principally an indigenous movement. This provocative claim, which goes against the received notions of the presence of a Communist International, runs parallel to my thesis on Philippine modernism that it was a principally *local response to global pressures*. In accord with Nemenzo's claim that "Communism in the Philippines sprang from an indigenous movement; [i]ts basic organizations antedated contacts with Comintern,"<sup>17</sup> we could say that modernism in the Philippines springs from indigenous conditions and struggles and develops its organization principles with far less connection to International Modernism than has been previously supposed. If this is correct, then Philippine modernism has far more autonomy and indigeneity than previously believed by its critics.

Also important for us in Nemenzo's history is his account of the movement's relation to intellectuals and to language. "The disciples of [Pedro] Abad Santos [who founded the Socialist Party in 1929] maintained that theoretical discussions are a waste of time. . . . People do not learn revolutionary theory by endless study meetings, but only by engaging in class combat. Two of their favorite maxims were: 'A single battle is worth ten schools' and 'Books make cowards out of men.'<sup>18</sup> Here, too, we grasp the growing frustration with the purchase words have on progressive history making, a frustration that would impel auditors toward practice as both maxims express a

growing skepticism regarding language's ability to organize the world in a politically effective manner. Thus, at the level of political analysis, we note three trends: the increasing awareness of social complexity, including the interrelatedness among various social registers; the decreasing purchase of language on nationalist aspiration; and the indigenous origins of what could be seen as a highly modernist, mass-based struggle: Communism. Therefore, with the increasing sense of logistical complexity pushing against the limits placed by hegemony and therefore culture, and with felt limits of language's ability to organize the social firmly in view, we can see social revolution and visuality appearing as parallel courses for history making.

For his part, H. R. Ocampo, one of the first non-objective painters in the Philippines and the principal practitioner of what came to be called Neorealism, wrote that he was "less interested in capturing a photographic semblance of nature" and "more preoccupied with the creation of new realities in terms of stress and strain."<sup>19</sup> In other words, the "non-objective" character of Neorealism was an effort to figure the new objective situation constituted through conflict—the struggle over the significance of things.<sup>20</sup> It is the principal argument of the first section of this book that H. R. Ocampo's abstractions were not mere copying of Western art forms, as has sometimes been asserted in a racist and imperialist manner. On the contrary, they were hard-won records of the new character of sociality and all that is implied by radical changes in the social fabric after the Second World War. Modernism in the Philippines did not just arrive on a boat with Victorio Edades's return to Manila in 1928, as is often repeated in the art-historiographical lore of the Philippines. Rather, like communism in the Philippines, modernism has strong indigenous roots. The creative power of Filipino people laboring under the leveraged constraints of U.S. imperialism and the full penetration of the money economy into the provinces must be credited with the occasion and execution of both the political and aesthetic revolutions that confronted forced modernization, modernism, and communism. While it is true that the "father" of

Philippine modernism, Victorio Edades, did return to Manila in 1928 from the University of Washington and the Armory show with a new set of tools and concepts, the origins of modernism are much deeper or more local than such a foundation myth would indicate. It has been said that "Edades opened the door to modern art and H. R. Ocampo walked right in." However, it is probably more appropriate, if less pithy, to say of Philippine modernism that a U.S. colonial modernity was installed with the help of "free trade," an English-language mass-educational system, a Euro-U.S. capital-dependent agricultural cash-crop export industry, which spawned a native oligarchy and reorganized rural waged labor, Central Intelligence Agency propaganda campaigns, a print-journalism culture, and an emergent mass-entertainment industry. Albeit fraught with compromises, Filipinos waged a modern revolution against their exploitation on various fronts, and cultural modernism was one of the fruits of this revolution.

Ocampo's abstractions (such as *Sampayan* [Clothesline], 1972, fig. 3) capture the changing dynamics of Philippine life as the people of Manila and its environs settle into the lower-intensity warfare that would characterize their encounter with the emergent world-system and rising globalization after the Second World War. This situation definitely includes the presence of restored U.S. forces—governmental, economic, and cultural—and the continuing disruption and exploitation in every level of the lived experience and practices of the Filipinos. But the great abstract paintings of Ocampo do more than merely grasp the shifting character of lived experience as shot through by vectors of aggregating and disaggregating force, often from sources unknown and driven by the proverbial maelstrom of modernity. Moreover, they do more than merely convert this transformation of lived experience into a formal principle that can be grasped less as a figure than as a process of figuration. Rather, these abstractions transpose the relations of reality being constituted through myriad relations of stress and strain into the visual realm. They convert the logic of Philippine social dynamics



into a visual practice. These causes make dynamics that were heretofore invisible appear at once conceptual and in excess of the conceptual as the visceral and the haptic—and in doing so, register the disruption of a reconfigured Philippines socius in visual terms. The increasing rationalization and fragmentation of modernity in its disruption of daily life and practice configure a visual that is simultaneously underpinned by logical rational calculus necessary to the organization of the new state but also experiential—haptic and visceral. Thus, it is not surprising that H. R. Ocampo developed a paint-by-number system as he streamlined and perfected his technique to compose the late paintings he classed as “visual symphonies.” At the height of his career, Ocampo even published an unfinished painting in a newspaper that subscribers were enjoined to complete at home by following the numbered color code (fig. 4). The rational-mathematic encroaches upon and iterates the visual-haptic.

As the following chapters will show, the transposition of a social logic into a visual process is in a fundamental way a consequence of a nationalist aspiration that becomes blocked in the register of narrative history—and indeed in history itself—and seeks another realm of freedom. As if the linguistic and even the semiotic were oversaturated, the visual represents a new opening, a new order of aesthetic or haptic experience, and a new terrain of social engagement. At almost the same moment, however, the visual is placed under siege by statist and capitalist visual technologies, including Cold War propaganda from the Office of Psychological Warfare under the Ramon Magsaysay regime and capitalized mass media bent upon organizing Filipino viewers as subjects of U.S. world hegemony. In the example above, perhaps what is most remarkable is that newspaper readers are invited to become viewers and painters. In creating a new set of visual forms and process, what also emerges is the displacement not only of language but also of a previous scopic regime. This displacement is effected by a social logic demanding a new type of visualization in which viewers themselves are enjoined

to construct an encoded visual reality. We should observe that the encoding of the visual is not (only) semiotic; rather, it is (also) experiential and affective.

The visual shift between what generically registers as a changeover from Socialist Realism to Neorealism also registers the intensifying displacement of a previous scopic regime and allows what we today describe as “visuality.”<sup>21</sup> Though both 1930s Socialist Realism and Neorealism are moments of modernism, the latter marks the complete transformation of the visual realm by the logistics of imperialism and its discontents. Although this claim remains to be proven, suffice it to say here that with the emergence of visuality proper, the perceptual apparatus itself, or the sensorium, suddenly becomes a scene of engagement, a zone of experience, and thus, a cyberspace of struggle. Through the publication of a paint-by-numbers, H. R. Ocampo invited readers to consciously participate in a generalized social, rational-mathematical process of sensual reorganization that, whether consciously or not, had readers in its grip. Thus, visual form might be understood as the result of a historical, participatory process and not as an organic registration of truth. If such a moment can be said to recognize the specificity and contingency of the visual, then it can also be seen as laying the groundwork for the emergence of the current concept of “visuality,” which presupposes the historicity of visual perception.

In Ocampo's work, the abstraction of social dynamics into a visual register was in Ocampo's works not only an intuition of an emergent tendency but also an engagement with the politics of social organization through visual and sensual means. As recent scholarship is beginning to show, the visual realm (cinema, television, advertising, digital media, their practices and theories) turns out to be decisive for the twentieth-century West in both global politics and economics. No less so, I will argue, in the Philippines.<sup>22</sup> Indeed what is fascinating is that in the Philippines, we can track the eruption of the modern visual, that is of visuality proper, in the *relative absence of technology*. Thus, from a forgotten novel of H. R.

Ocampo's that I will discuss in the following chapter, we might deduce that with imperialism, the visual has become the new bandwidth for the organization of social relations under the rubric of what will later in the century be called "globalization." Ocampo's novel, *Scenes and Spaces*, makes clear early on that the visual will be one of the pre-eminent registers in which twentieth-century conflicts will be fought. The contemporary corporate model of "selling eyeballs to advertisers" might suggest that the ends of visual mediations functioning in the interest of capital-logic were twofold: to acquire the eyes so recently being acquired by Filipinos and to enjoin these eyes to see in accord with the logic of capitalist acquisition.

### *Socialist Realism*

The second key sociohistorical moment here is the rejection of abstraction as a style by radical artists that took place during the Marcos period, when the "official" social status of abstract work, such as that of H. R. Ocampo, was at its zenith. This moment, which produced the group of works falling under the category of Socialist Realism, or SR, was informed by direct efforts to portray the abstract forces that held Philippine society in its grip. This second appearance of Socialist Realism fully understood that abstract forces were visible in concrete particularities through their effects on the lives of the people. In many cases SR was an expression of solidarity with, if not an accompaniment to the ongoing armed struggle against the Marcos regime and U.S. imperialism. If, with the introduction of television, Marcos spectacles and cosmetic urban renewal bent upon hiding the living conditions of the urban poor, the visual arena was increasingly becoming a medium for imperialism, how did artists make images that ran counter to imperialism in the visual realm? During this period, roughly between 1972 and 1986, artists—painters and filmmakers—created images capable of showing what commercial images and the images proffered by the dictatorship were at pains to avoid. These images connected transnational and oligarchic profits

with the daily experiences of suffering, debilitation, humiliation, and brutality endured by the masses. They questioned the logic of development and acquisition in such a way that Filipino eyes might clearly perceive the consequences of normative and normalizing modes of perception. Thus, despite the concreteness and grit of SR images, the images demanded abstract readings to achieve their amplitude—that is, their meaning in the struggle against dictatorship and imperialism. They were fundamentally dialectical. The entire SR movement can be thought of as the ramifying of the visual realm opened up by/as abstract art. In it the space of the imaginary, opened up as a realm of freedom by the dialectics of nationalist struggle, becomes a site of struggle. The weapons in that zone are the techniques and technologies of the imaginary.

Cinema becomes particularly relevant here. Tragically, in Philippine cinema, nearly all the films of the prewar era have been lost. What is known of the early moments of this long filmmaking tradition survives in the form of posters, program notes, short published reviews, and descriptions. Until his death, Agustín Sotto—who worked with Lino Brocka and at the Cultural Center of the Philippines and taught for many years at the University of the Philippines Institute for Mass Communication—was a key figure in Philippine film historiography and restoration. Filmmakers and critics Nick Deocampo and Emmanuel Reyes are currently reconstructing these elements the traumatic loss of which has robbed the Philippines of a powerful material record of its visuality. However, the films that are central to this project (many of which are also in danger of disappearing because of inadequate funding for archiving and preservation), are principally part of what is called the "Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema," which began during the time of Marcos's martial law.<sup>23</sup>

Concurrent with the socialist realism of martial law cinema, there rose a strong suit of SR painters who included Neil Doloricon, Antipas Delotavo, Danny Dalena, Egai Fernandez, Pablo Baens Santos, Papo de Asis, Orlando Castillo, Renato Habulan, Al

Mantique, and Jose Tence-Ruiz, among others. Many of these artists were active in the communist underground or in the broader progressive movement of the Left, and their paintings directly reflected the people's plights. For polemical reasons, I refer to the SR works of this period as *Socialist Realist*, in part because much of the work was conceived in the context of socialist/communist struggles against the state, and in part because I feel that the ongoing nationalist struggle for social justice that informs these works is essential when viewing them.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as Flaudette May Datuin points out, other artists—including Imelda Cajipe-Endaya, Julie Lluch, Brenda Pajardo, and Ofelia Gelvezon-Tequi—belong to the “important aesthetic stream of the 1970s: social realism and its aesthetics of protest.”<sup>25</sup> These painters have bolstered the ranks of the current generation of activist painters composed of communists, feminists, activists, and fellow travelers.

Overall, the significance of the break between part 1 and part 2 of this book, a break which I locate at the declaration of martial law, is that from 1945 to 1972, abstraction tended to log the fragmentation of form resulting from new social forces playing over the concrete or objective surface of the world. What characterizes the SR moment is an effort to show how contesting social forces are impacted within objects and situations that nonetheless appear (through processes of reification) as ordinary or “natural” objects or situations. After the trauma of the war and the scramble for power inaugurated by Philippine Independence in 1946, it was the breaking up of traditional realist forms and the eruption of new realms that was thematized by cutting-edge visual artists. In the clamped-down context of martial law, visual artists strove to represent the repressed forces at work within the reality of Marcos-officiated conditions of imposed normalcy. “Reality” was imposed in order to contain objective contradictions. The SR movement provided interpretive strategies, i.e., weapons that would release these contradictions and render legible the abstract social forces ambient in the isolated situations and frozen objects.

The portion of my project on Philippine cinema endeavors to continue the analysis of certain structures of the becoming-totalitarian society outlined by Filipino cinematic works in the period during and immediately after martial law. Certain strains from this period, alongside the communist movement and its intellectuals, fellow travelers, social-realist painters and the EDSA revolt of 1986 (a revolt that was itself a media revolt), provide a crucial and sustained, albeit sometimes disguised, critique of U.S.-sponsored martial law and U.S. imperialism. The radical dispensation of these films are often propeople, prowoman, pro-*bakla* (“gay”), antifascist, anti-imperialist, and anticapitalist. These films of the Second Golden Age release strains of desiring and of desiring-liberation that irrepressibly persist today, albeit in other new forms. The chapters on cinema endeavor to highlight the contents of some of the most relevant categories of a confrontation between radical strains in Philippine cinema and society against the conservative and oppressive logic of the hegemonic Philippine socius. These confrontations—at once aesthetic, conceptual, visceral, and political—include the structuring of libidinal relations, the details of economic organization, the gendering and empowerment of subjects, ecological and geographical strategies of contestation and containment, class antagonism, and the social role of the spectacular and the sublime. To a greater or lesser degree, in both the SR movement and in the Second Golden Age, all of these abstract categories are suddenly understood as bearing upon daily life.

In SR painting, the figure is reintroduced into the visual as a way of concretizing and territorializing a barrage of increasingly abstract and deterritorialized forces. Furthermore, the consolidation of power in the figure of former Pres. Ferdinand Marcos allowed for the introduction of antithetical figures. Even though in many respects Marcos was a figurehead for a logistics of domination orchestrated by U.S. capital, as a conceit, dictatorship reintroduced the figure of the individual into the politicized media of social life. The image of Marcos was a strategy of control, and counterimages of members of



the masses, both in painting and in the cinema, became strategic weapons in the struggle for liberation.

Although there are several major directors worthy of serious consideration (the Philippines has the third or fourth largest film industry in the world, depending on how you count), I confine my discussion primarily to Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal. Lino Brocka attended the University of the Philippines on scholarship and, not having grown up speaking English, spent a lot of time as a propboy with the Department of Speech and Drama, even emptying out Coke bottles full of urine since the bathroom was too far from the theater for anyone to use during rehearsals. Upon seeing his films, talking with his compatriots, or reading his words, it is difficult to doubt that he was a man of the people. Not only are his films (of which there are approximately seventy) bent upon showing the struggles of the poor and the structural inequalities that overdetermine the character of these struggles, but he was the first and, perhaps, the only filmmaker during martial law who dared to show footage of urban protests, strikes, and rallies in his films. Ishmael Bernal, probably the only other filmmaker of the period to consistently create works on par with those of Brocka, himself made over fifty films. He was deeply impelled by the aesthetics and philosophical import of the dialectics of oppression. He also considered himself, rightly, I think, a feminist filmmaker. Because of the high-key aesthetic character of his work, he was claimed by both the Left and Right on the occasion of his death in 1996. Or, more particularly, members of the reigning conservative cultural establishment felt compelled to deny he had any ties to Marxism. However, the dialectical character of his films, together with their propeople affect attests to Bernal's Marxist axiomatics.<sup>26</sup>

If "Philippines 2000," as then Pres. Fidel V. Ramos's administration called the coming millennium during the late 1990s, is properly understood as the legacy of the Marcos regime, in principle it should be possible to establish a catalog of critical modes of cinematic thought that emerged during the period preceding the present,

which could then be re-evaluated in order to critique and transform the near-totalitarian order of globalization as it is currently manifest in the Philippines. In its investigation of spectacle, sexuality, and mediated desire, Philippine cinema interrogates the role of the visual in the conscription of bodies by power, along with the potentiality of the visual in assembling alternative mediations, analytic strategies, and communities.

In chapter 3, "Directing the Real: *Orapronobis* against Philippine Totalitarianism (2000)," I analyze Lino Brocka's banned film *Orapronobis* [Fight for Us, 1989]. By tacking back and forth between underground radio, "salvaging" (extrajudicial summary execution) of suspected rebels by Right-wing vigilante groups, the kidnapping and torture of activists and their families, and the commercial media coverage or noncoverage of these events, Brocka's *Orapronobis* organizes an alternative context for the signification of televised information that allows it to exceed the parameters of officiated reality and achieve greater amplitude. *Orapronobis* organizes what I call "the invisible of television," that is, all those myriad forms of social mediation that do not legibly appear in the corporate-controlled public sphere. In showing that the Corazon C. Aquino regime continues martial law practices under the sign of democracy, Brocka passes through the spectacle, built upon willed and systemic violation of the masses, in order to critique it, thereby creating alternative mediations and revealing an alternative reality mandating new actions. This presence of the abstract in the concrete—of a world view covertly embedded in the visible surfaces of the world—was one of the key principles deduced from socialist-realist practices during martial law.

Chapter 4, "Third Cinema in a Global Frame: *Curacha*, *Yahoo!* and *Manila by Night*," looks closely at Ishmael Bernal's powerful work *Manila by Night* (1980). I examine the film both in the context of martial law, which censored the film (refusing to allow "Manila" in the title and forcing a cut version to be released as *City after Dark*), and in the light of some theoretical issues central to my

work. These issues regarding the production of communitarian affects come to the theoretical and political fore well after *Manila by Night* was made but are nonetheless present in Bernal's film in a proleptic manner. To emphasize the extreme alienation endemic to the present scopic regime, I begin this chapter with a discussion of Chito Roño's *Curacha: Ang Babaeng Walang Pabinga* [Curacha: Woman Without Rest, 1998], Mike de Leon's *Aliwan Paradise* [Leisure Paradise, 1993], and what I call the NASDAQing of perceptual practices using the example of Yahoo! In the aftermath of martial law, the ascendancy of the new material forces of capture emerges as hegemonic image relations. This analysis of the present, which in effect shows the trajectory of hegemonic image function as the cutting edge of neoimperialism, underscores Bernal's counter-hegemonic production of affect.<sup>27</sup> In this way, chapter 4 serves as a bridge to part 3's more sustained consideration of affect and the politics thereof.

The category "Third Cinema" that appears in the title and as a subject of this chapter would testify that the domain of the visual is one of the great scenes of struggle in the twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> In so doing, it would implicate all Hollywood and the vast television networks as agents of imperialism. The struggle that is Third Cinema hinges on the question of how to mediate social realities in a manner that transforms them in accord with the just claims of the people—those who in the contemporary are made to disappear, rendered otherwise invisible or (dis)figured under various iterations of the inhuman. Third Cinema poses profound challenges both to the mediating forces of capital and for the mediating forces of revolution. This situation, in which the visual is grasped as a *mise-en-scène* of revolution, is no less true in the Philippines.

### *Syncretic Realism (Realism as Mediation)*

The third plot twist in the trajectory of abstraction drawn in this volume manifests itself in a new type of strain on the figure. As my

discussion in chapter 4 already begins to show, the return of the figure in the 1970s did not make viable a continual reiteration of social realism as a counterhegemonic force, at least in the sense that the term Social Realism is ordinarily understood. The ouster of Marcos left many, if not most, of the fundamental relations of exploitation in the Philippines intact. That Marcos could disappear, and that democracy could be nominally restored while the masses continued to suffer, prostituted Filipinas became overseas Filipino workers (or OFWs), and radicals continued to be murdered, gave the lie to a particular fantasy about the importance of individuals. Clearly individuated bodies continued to exist, and most important, to suffer, but the causes and forces determining the suffering were once again imagined as structural and abstract. Because the structural and abstract forces of society have achieved a heretofore unprecedented penetration into and dissemination through the social body, today's questions, although still focused on issues of nation, gender, sexuality, and class, involve problems of faith, affect, solidarity, and the work of culture. Individuals themselves are composites of myriad and oftentimes contradictory social vectors. In contrast to the post-war period, the abstractions are not lurking at the margins of a normative reality but are infused in the everyday, even erupting through and mixing with its surfaces, as if the elements of daily life were at once themselves and the cybernetic instruments of some terrible conspiracy bent upon enforcing penury, suffering, indifference, and inhumanity even through the very avenues of liberation offered to "consumers."

In the early 1990s, the work of the two most visible collectives of figurative painters in Manila, Salingpusa [Informal Player] and Sanggawa [One Work], might be described by terms such as concrete expressionism or syncretic realism. Concrete expressionism is a category I use to describe an expressionist contortion and coloration of figures and metropolitan spaces meant to index the "normal" state of affairs. Many of the works endeavor to portray the great concrete structures such as the brutal overpasses and virulent sky-

scrapers that dominate the senses in Manila as volitional entities by themselves. These Metro Manila-based works are interested in showing different aspects of the causticity of life in the megalopolis of more than eleven million, in which more than 40 percent are squatters and a certain square mile has the highest population density in the world. As residents well know, Metro Manila's traffic is probably the worst in the world and the air quality is, in many parts of the metropolis, contaminated with three to five times the lead allowance specified as maximally tolerable by the World Health Organization. These outgrowths of Metro Manila's program—if that is an adequate term for a virulent uneven development beyond the control of any particular individual or group—have increased exponentially in their scale and aggressivity, making representations of the metropolis at once extremely difficult and absolutely essential.

Metro Manila has been particularly difficult to represent in part because there have been until quite recently few opportunities for aerial perspectives and no real urban cores. Skyscrapers abut shanties. Only the major roadway EDSA, upon which millions of commuters travel each day, seems to serve as a collective geographical referent. At any moment, there is often so much in the visual field that the conventions of representation would be short-circuited if one were to attempt to portray the energy and pressure of what is seen. Corporate culture has not been eager to develop technologies or visual practices that would allow the social relations that might appear to the eye, inscribed as they are across the surface of society, to be discerned or decoded. This is because doing so would tell of the suffering, privation, and bloodshed that produces social cohesion through the continuous, destructive war on the masses. Thus, the present generation of artists employs the affective qualities of form in their struggle with geography, space, interaction, and becoming in the struggle to represent and objectify lived experience. Although the best young painters in Manila during the 1990s had a kind of realist ethic, their aesthetics does not fully overlap with what falls under the heading of Socialist Realism. Furthermore, it would

be a mistake to believe that this generation of painters is interested only in representing the under- or unrepresented. Much of their work seems dedicated to creating new ways both to apprehend and transform the very conditions of existence. Thus, the paradigm of "representation" gives way to a paradigm of affect.

In my view a key figure in the 1990s dispensation of the visual is Emmanuel Garibay, who began by making images that dramatize a moment of seeing by engaging the viewer in a narrative set in an urban context. Garibay's work of the mid-1990s forces the viewer to slow sight down and move among the various elements, almost invariably poverty-worn faces in contemporary social situations on buses, jeepneys, or the street. In a highly cinematic manner, viewers adopt the standpoint of the various participants in a particular frame, and in making sense of the situation depicted circulate their identifications and emotions among the community. In addition to Garibay's jeepney work, there is a more recent strain of work which he calls his Kristology series. This work is in the tradition of Liberation Theology, or what Garibay and others in the Philippine context call "the theology of struggle." The influence of Christianity in the Philippines is profound, and for Garibay the spiritual realm, from Spanish colonization to the present, has been instrumentally severed from the daily experiences of the Filipino by a Church that has inherited the legacy of Spanish colonialism and continues to serve colonial masters. These paintings offer new and contemporary visions of Christ and other members of the Christian pantheon but not, at least in the best ones, as beings to be seen but as forms to be seen through. I cannot here attempt to describe these works in any detail. Suffice it to say that in the simplest of them (*Bisita* [Visitor], 1995), the viewer finds him or herself at a table with peasants being treated as a foreman or landowner. Only after beginning to look around does s/he notice that the virtual hands that are to be his/hers have stigmata. The rhetorical force of discovering who you are supposed to be, as you look at the faces around you, is stunning. Although it is almost unthinkable before seeing this work that a



painting could insist that you see through the eyes of Christ, this painting—which strives to restructure a paternalistic gaze into a fraternal and loving one—is only one example of Garibay's ability to control or even commandeer the gaze to harness it for progressive purposes. In a fully denatured situation, perception is itself taken as a technology that must be remediated. Chapter 5 of this volume discusses the Christological work and chapter 6 deals with the questions raised by Garibay's work regarding visuality and urban experience.

Although Garibay is for me the most interesting of the new painters with whom I am familiar, many members of the Salingpusa and Sanggawa groups also deploy modalities of seeing (and not only semiotic contents) that oppose the logic of globalization. It is significant to note that of all the abstract painters from the previous generation, most of these contemporary painters seem to feel the closest link to H. R. Ocampo. This, I believe, is because of the manner in which Ocampo questions the mediation of vision and takes painting as a medium that might remediate a vision under siege in the Philippine context. In this respect, one could speak of a continuity of struggle within the Philippine modernist tradition, or from Philippine modernism to what might tentatively be called Philippine postmodernism (or postfailed modernism), even though there has been a dramatic shift in the formal character of the work.

Finally, I want to add that the control and modulation of vision is being increasingly understood as fundamental to the maintenance of power. The artworks in the Philippines endeavoring to disrupt the habits of seeing, practiced at different levels of society and essential to the maintenance of the marginal status of the majority of Filipinos, use both indigenous and international elements. Inasmuch as they use indigenous elements, the works appeal to the individual and collective experiences of marginality. The extraordinary work of Elmer Borlongan is capable of showing the weight of history and lived experience corporally coupled to a moment of subjective self-creation. His lines and "distortions" render the

psychosocial tensions that literally bind the figure and from which the figure seeks relief. The figure's form carries all the weight of the historical and the social. This form constitutes the figure, and is the condition from which it seeks liberation. The works of Fernan Escora depict the total penetration of "domestic" spaces by media and exterior forces. Dansoy Coquilla paints from an aerial perspective, a view very likely unthinkable and certainly unrepresented before the presence of transnational capital's all-seeing grasp of the socius, not to mention its construction of flyovers and tall buildings.

The best contemporary paintings "affirm while they protest," in Paul Gilroy's phrase. They rely on complex modalities developed over the history of Philippine art and visual culture. Inasmuch as they use international elements, they aspire to create international alliances and understanding or to critically depict the presence of the global in the local. Clearly, the terms of Philippine oppression are dictated in part by external elements. The overcoming of this oppression depends upon forms of consciousness aware of international forces as well as upon forms of international solidarity linked to indigenous struggle. No Olympian mode has emerged or now could emerge (Coquilla's aerial perspective depicts cross-eyed workers, pedestrians, and jeepney riders scuttling about). But what is visible in the connections being made between local situations and global media-politics by these painters are superhuman situations: supreme abjection, sublime technologization, new perspectives and points of view, and new theological and/or spiritual possibilities.

From the point of view that regards Philippine modernism as at once external and internal to international modernism rather than as peripheral and epiphenomenal, Philippine modern artworks do not appear as mere derivative imitations—which in the ignorance of a racist episteme, they sometimes have been accused of being—but rather as expressions of the unthought contradictions of modernity. To study Philippine painting should not be to embark upon some rarefied, high-cultural enterprise with the final goal of producing another coffee table book, generating "appreciation," and increasing

the value of works owned by the collectors. Although it is always pleasant to have pictures of the work of artists, there is little to be learned from such a narcissistic undertaking that is not already known. Nor, in my opinion, should the study of Philippine painting be about waving one's wand about and pronouncing some works good and others bad, based upon merely formal criteria acquired by going to European museums. Rather, we must take the visual creativity of twentieth-century Filipino painters as an engagement with the larger social sphere and its transformed conditions of visibility. If we do not think of the painted canvas in some relation to commodification, to mass media, and to the systems of oppression these sustain and intensify (class hierarchy, patriarchy, homophobia, racism, and environmental devastation, among others), that is, if we do not learn to see a painting both as thought and as struggle, then there will be nothing to see in our galleries and museums but different iterations of money. Thus, in addition to providing an overview of the stakes, periods, and questions central to *Acquiring Eyes*, this introduction has endeavored to raise new sets of questions about what is to be done with the image.

## PART I NEOREALISM

### *Stymied Realism: Emergence of Visuality, Cinematization of Materiality, and Appearance of Abstraction in the Context of U.S. Imperialism (1928–1972)*

#### *The Artist as Filipino*

Hernando R. Ocampo, posthumously named National Artist in 1991—thirteen years after his death in 1978—was born in Santa Cruz, on the outskirts of Manila, in 1911. He worked as a boot-black, a bus-ticket vendor, a bartender in a cabaret, and a correspondence clerk for the Philippine Education Company, before he became a short-story writer, an assistant editor for the *Herald Mid-week Review*, editor of *This Week Magazine* of the *Manila Chronicle*, a screenwriter, a film and radio producer, an advertising consultant as well as, most famously, a painter. Jailed after the Second World War by the authorities on suspicion of being a collaborator with the Japanese,<sup>1</sup> Ocampo was a member of the Veronicans, the best-known group of modernist writers before the war, as well as of the 13 Moderns, a group of modernist painters consolidated after the Second World War, and of the Neorealist Group. He was also

## *Conclusion, or What Now?*

*Acquiring Eyes* demonstrates that fundamental shifts in visuality are at once constitutive changes and practical effects of modernization in the Philippines. Images, in short, are social relations and are, therefore, at once ciphers of these relations and productive of them. Thus, this book reads paintings and films not only for their manifest contents, but for what they have to say as media regarding modes of life and struggle.

In tracing the ascension of visuality in the Philippines, I have detailed three moments of abstraction gathered under the headings Neorealism, Socialist Realism, and Syncretic Realism. If I had to single out one idea as the most important contribution of this book, it would be that visuality is not ephiphenomenal in relation to postcolonial modernity but central to it. The visual as a semiautonomous realm emerges first as a realm of freedom and then as a zone of bitter struggle. In the postcolony, the historical struggle shatters language-based nationalism and its narratives, particularly as the nation is handed over by the neocolonialists in the U.S., and the visual opens up as the emerging interface between expropriators of all stripes and the people who labor. In short, in the postcolony the visual is at once a new area of colonization and a means to sustain

the traditional relations of domination. It is, therefore, also a site of value production and a site of struggle.

While I have made the arguments in this book primarily utilizing examples of metropolitan visual culture, I have done so in order to look at the movement of hegemony and counterhegemony. The best way to establish the emergence in the Philippines of what elsewhere I have called the cinematic mode of production was by focusing on the autoethnographic dimensions of Philippine modernism and its legacy, that is, by focusing on cultural products in which the nation was being imagined vis-à-vis an imperialist Other. It is from the perspective of the Philippines, in which early modern visual shifts occurred in the relative absence of technology, that I have settled on the term "world-media system" to indicate the cofunctioning of what has been called the "world system and globalization," and what I call the "cinematic mode of production." In the dialectics of domination and resistance, economic, political, and corporeal domination takes the cultural form of the foreclosure of viable national liberation narratives in English and the growing expropriation of visuality while resistance adds to its standard practices forms of innovation in the visual sphere that are adequate to create figures of counterhegemony and posit strategies that are counterhegemonic. This dialectic of peoples' struggles and global capital works toward an overall transformation in the mode of production. In the world-media system, visual attention becomes productive of society. Today, the Philippine socius, like societies all over the globe, is dominated not only by economic, military, and "political" vectors, but also by images from cinema and television that coordinate fantasy, desire, proprioception, ideas about possible futures, and images of race and nation with the agendas of the world market and global capitalism. These visuo-cybernetic extensions of the capitalist world system extract human time as they enjoin viewers to participate in and, indeed, produce the conceits of globalization. It is only through the dialectical transformation of vision into a socially productive activity that culture emerges as the necessary scene of domination and confronta-



nion it has become. Thus, I have tried to provide a historical material account of what elsewhere has been called "The Cultural Turn." I have also tried to provide a Marxist account of Filipino cultural forms, and sketch, albeit in an overly general way, the transformations that have taken place in the social production of value that would necessarily modify the labor theory of value such that "sensual labor" comes to mean visual attention and, more generally, human attention.

In the Philippines, important changes in visibility arise with the disruption and displacement of nationalist narrative by the U.S. imperialist presence. During that time, as I have argued, the visual becomes first a realm of freedom (as linguistic breakdown of narrative in English and as abstract art) and then, during the 1950s, a site of struggle. Then, during martial law (1972–1986) and its regulation of the people through a careful balance of brutality and spectacle, visibility becomes an explicitly political arena of engagement for radical image makers. After the EDSA revolution (1986), the subjective and experiential aspects of visibility come to the fore. The deposition of the Marcoses and the decentralization of power and the vast penetration of the social fabric by commercial (capitalized) images means that the agency of one's own vision becomes a point of political departure. As noted earlier, we are enjoined to produce actively our own destruction. The spectacle is the obverse of the spectral—the spectrality of the subject and the populous. Alienated visibility, sensuality, and spirituality must be restored, or at least be struggled for, in the next phase of social revolution, just as the reappropriation of other alienated products of humanity (general wealth) must continue to be a purpose of our struggle.

Obviously, there is far more work to be done here in developing what might be thought of as a revolutionary sensorium. This sensorium would be able to viscerally perceive the direct connections between, for example, spectacle glamor and debilitating poverty, connections that are necessarily obfuscated in the legitimating marketing, politicking, and subject formation of current global capitalism—not just cognitive mapping but also perceptual trans-

forming. One current trend in the Philippine art world toward formal abstraction, that is, "abstract art," a trend that includes the "MMDA art" today appearing on every wall facing a road in Manila, seems to me to be exactly what is not necessary here. This work seems particularly formalist and dehistoricizing, as if around only to provide a familiar, soft-focus relation to the outside and to make the rest of the world go down easier. We need new modes of abstraction, not more old ones.

In any case, the three moments of abstraction detailed in this volume are correlated with historical time frames covering the periods from just before the Second World War to U.S.-backed martial law under Marcos, from martial law to the People Power revolution, and from People Power to the recent People Power 2. Overall, the book charts the shifting properties of the visual as visibility becomes increasingly central both to Filipino struggles for autonomy and self-determination and for global capital's intensifying domination through the process called globalization. The three moments are briefly recapitulated below.

*Phase I, Neorealism:* Neorealism is characterized by the autonomization of vision and the splitting of visibility from narrative, after the Second World War. My argument focused primarily on National Artist H. R. Ocampo, who was a novelist, a short-story writer, a screenwriter, and most famously, a painter. His serial novel of the late-1930s wound characters into irresolvable conflicts in which their aspirations were impossibly frustrated and broke off into hallucinatory passages that were predominantly visual. These hallucinatory passages that exploded out of an otherwise realist narrative described the formal character of the paintings he was to execute after the war and into the 1970s. During H. R. Ocampo's career and through his work, vision emerges as a scene of struggle on a new scale and in a transformed mode, becoming nothing less than a potential realm of freedom. When the narrative possibility of nationalist fulfillment was shut down, that is, as it became apparent that Philippine nationalist aspirations were not to realize themselves in history, H. R.

Ocampo invented a form of abstraction known as Neorealism, which represented a radical break from both the narrative and visual-realist traditions prevalent at the time. The height of this form of abstract art followed the postwar evisceration of the Huks and continued through the return of a heightened level of activism in the 1960s.

In Ocampo's Neorealist works, representation never falls out entirely, except in a few cases, but the transformative gesture of the artist, the distortions wrought, the abstractions formed, produced an aesthetic and perceptual thrill that was an exercise of aesthetic power both on the part of the viewer and the painter. As such, it took up the new properties of social materials caught in the field of U.S. neocolonialism (and shot through with the abstract logic of racism, capitalism, neocolonialism, and patriarchy) but was also an extension of the autonomy of the subject, an expansion of capacities that allowed him/her to participate in the largess of the world, and to exercise new forms of agency. This search for virility and plenitude in the visual I read as a kind of would-be nationalism that in the postindependence Philippines was somehow a compensatory reservoir for nationalist aspiration incompletely realized in the nation that was strategically granted by U.S. interests. The unfreedom experienced by the Philippines under an interimperialist war and then under President Magsaysay in a Cold War context did not satisfy.

Shortly before and after the war, aesthetic debate between "conservatives" and "moderns" was, according to artist and art historian Rod Paras Perez, a debate between "ideal" and "feeling," or, we might say, between concept and viscosity.<sup>1</sup> The ascendance of the sensual over the ideal, of the image over the word, allowed for the valorization of individual and indigenous elements, including what became the unique palette of Filipino Art, the particular cluttered and interlocking spatial organization christened the "Pinoy Baroque" by Emmanuel Torres, distinctive Pinoy elements such as the jeepney, the carabao, and the myriad new forms these generated.<sup>2</sup> This visual arena achieved viability, even as the visual came directly under attack by CIA agents in their media manipulation of the Philippine

electoral process after the Second World War, and later by U.S. popular culture, generally. The fact of "psywar" shows that the unconscious and the process of language dysfunction implied by that idea were becoming more relevant in the Philippines.<sup>3</sup> Even if there was a diminishing narrative basis for nationalist affirmation (the narrative of revolution became difficult to tell during the period between the Second World War and the onset of martial law) and even as the visual was being conscripted for imperialist ends, there was a sensual possibility in the visual. Here one might grasp the dialectics of these images: the *work* of art during this period is the struggle against the historical and narratological foreclosure of reality.

*Phase 2, Socialist Realism:* Socialist Realism is marked by the growing understanding that the battle for perception was the battle for reality. Filmmakers and painters develop strategies for directing the Real through the directing of perception. The schism of the signifier/signified is understood as pre-eminently social and, therefore, the arena of politics. The NPAA artists wanted to expand perception in order to clarify and demystify the stakes of social struggle and represent society as process. They also wanted to appeal to a mass audience. This investigation and resolution of social appearance/appearing strove to indicate class struggle as the basic organizing principle of society and, thus, as the hermeneutic key to its mystifications. Socialist Realist images sought to provide the conceptual tools to dismantle the appearance of things, that is, they strove to de-reify things and show them as relations. This dismantling entailed a new level of abstraction, one that had internalized the analysis of the commodity form, in that it saw the materials of daily life as abstractions from the system of class society and sought to provide a symbolic technology of abstractions to re-articulate social form and make clear the necessity and immanence of revolution.

In the cinema of this period, subjective realization through collective forms is still central but, in the manner of Lukacsian Realism, reality will delimit subjective fantasy unless communal struggle realizes new subjective possibilities socially. For example, in Lino

Brock's *Maynila sa Kuko ng Liwanag* [Manila in the Claws of the Neon Light], Manila is understood as an image that gives rise to a fantasy about the promises of urban life, but the narrative shows that this fantasy of prosperity, which in fact organizes the destiny of the characters, cannot be realized under present social conditions and, indeed, leads to their ruin. It seems to me that Filipino Socialist Realism understands, as will Jean Baudrillard and Sean Cubitt in different contexts, that capital reorganizes social life as it reorganizes perception and that there is a growing inadequation between these two spheres. The increasingly self-conscious organization of a set of fantasies that are incommensurate with exploitative material conditions and yet necessary to sustain these otherwise unendurable conditions and which, at another level, further preclude a coming to terms with this particular relation between apparent and real conditions is the meaning of cultural imperialism. Given that many Socialist Realist films and paintings endeavor to portray the structuring of the perceptual field as a process of imperialist capitalization, one could well see Filipino Social Realist cinema as a precursor to the recent Hollywood film *The Matrix*. In showing the operative modes of collective fantasy and then showing the forces that organize reality beneath the fantasy, we can see that culture and cultural form become the cutting edges of economic exploitation. The predominant dialectic here can be described as follows: the work of art is a *moment of struggle in the collective struggle* against the foreclosure of reality.

*Phase 3, Syncretic Realism:* Syncretic Realism is characterized by an intensifying awareness of the imbrication of perception and reality. If seeing, creating, and being are not becoming coterminous, then at the very least their tendencies toward becoming one another are ineluctable. If cultural programming is the medium of social organization, then cultural intervention is potentially, if not necessarily, revolutionary. There comes to the fore a sense that to transform perception and perceptual practices is already a material transformation, a shift in the programming. Syncretic Realism, one possible

nomenclature for contemporary work, combines contradictory elements (that is, elements that would negate one another's existence) and uses elements from the built environment to express subjective and/or experiential sensibilities of hopelessness, outrage, sublimity, and endurance as part of the social totality. The social logic is shown to be in the materials themselves or, put another way, perception is staged as a material process. Thus, the artist (or at least, the art) posits the viewer as always already part of the material, therefore, as a producer and medium.<sup>4</sup> The predominant dialectic is that the work of art mediates affects, each of which is potentially transformative. *The work of art functions as a network, a kind of connective tissue* that enables experiences, links, and alliances that take viewers beyond themselves and toward an outside. It is a cybernetic engagement with the viewer, a kind of social reprogramming. The scale of the interventions in the contemporary is thus far, at least, that of the microperceptual, the momentary, the affective, and the spiritual rather than that of the macrostructures of class and nation. The capitalist world-media system, otherwise known as globalization, finds its antithesis in subjective and affective links and practices that instantiate new orders of solidarity.

Let six billion flowers bloom!



## Ishmael Bernal Filmography (1971-1993)

- 1971 *Pagdating sa Dulo* [Reaching the Top]  
*Daluyong* [Wave]
- 1972 *El Vibora* [The Viper]  
*Inspirasyon* [Inspiration]  
*Till Death Do Us Part*  
*Now and Forever*  
*Zoom Zoom Superman*  
*Popeye atbp.* [Popeye etc.]
- 1973 *Pito ang Asawa Ko* [I have Seven Spouses]  
*The Sleeping Dragon*
- 1974 *Scotch on the Rocks to Remember, Black Coffee to Forget*  
(Unreleased)  
*Mister Mo, Lover Boy Ko* [Your Husband, My Lover]  
*Lumayo . . . Lumapit ang Umaga* [Morning Moved Away  
. . . Then Moved Close]
- 1975 *Ligaw na Bulaklak* [Wildflower]  
*Babaeng Hiwalay sa Asawa* [Anna Karenina; Woman Separated from the Husband]
- 1976 *Tisoy* [Mestizo]  
*Nunal sa Tubig* [Mole in the Water]  
*Dalawang Pugad, Isang Ibon* [Two Nests, One Bird]  
*Lahing Pilipino* (Bonifacio Episode) [Pilipino Race]  
*Walang Katapusang Tag-araw* [Never-Ending Summer]
- 1977 *Lagi Lamang ba Akong Babae?* [Do I Always Remain a Woman?]

- 1978 *Isang Gabi sa Iyo, Isang Gabi sa Akin* [One Night Yours, Another Night Mine]  
*Ikaw ay Akin* [You are Mine]
- 1979 *Menor de Edad* [Underaged]  
*Boy Kodyak*  
*Bakit may Pag-ibig pa* [Why is There Love?]  
*Aliw* [Pleasure]
- 1980 *Salawahan* [Unfaithful]  
*Good Morning Sunshine*  
*Sugat sa Ugat* [Wound in the Vein]  
*City after Dark* [Manila by Night]  
*Girlfriend*
- 1981 *Pabling* [Playboy]
- 1982 *Ito ba ang Ating mga Anak?* [Are These Our Children?]  
*Galawgaw* [Frisky]  
*Relasyon* [Affair]  
*Hindi Kita Malimot* [I Can't Forget You]  
*Himala* [Miracle]  
*Broken Marriage*
- 1984 *Working Girls I*  
*Shake, Rattle and Roll—Pridyider Episode*
- 1985 *Gamitin Mo Ako* [Use Me]
- 1986 *The Graduates*
- 1987 *Hinugot sa Langit* [Drawn from Heaven]  
*Working Girls II*  
*Pinulot Ka lang sa Lupa* [You were Merely Picked Up from the Earth]
- 1988 *Nagbabagang Luha* [Red Hot Tears]
- 1989 *Pahiram ng Isang Umaga* [Lend Me One Morning]
- 1992 *Mahal Kita, Walang Iba* [I Love You, No One Else]
- 1993 *Wating* [Streetsmart]

Limbo Brocka Filmography (1970-1991)

- 1970 *Wanted: Perfect Mother*  
*Santiago*
- 1971 *Tubog sa Ginto* [Dipped in Gold/Gold-plated]  
*Now*  
*Lumuha Pati mga Anghel* [Even the Angels Cried]  
*Cadena de Amor* [Chain of Love]  
*Stardoom*
- 1972 *Villa Miranda*  
*Cherry Blossoms*
- 1974 *Tinimbang Ka ngunit Kulang* [You were Weighed but  
Found Wanting]  
*Tatlo, Dalawa, Isa* [Three, Two, One]
- 1975 *Maynila, sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* [Manila in the  
Claws of Lights/Manila in the Claws of Neon  
Lights]  
*Dung-aw* [Lamentation]
- 1976 *Lunes, Martes, Miyerkules, Huwebes, Biyernes, Sabado,*  
*Linggo* [Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday,  
Friday, Saturday, Sunday]  
*Insiang*
- 1977 *Tahan na Empoy, Tahan* [Stop Crying Empoy,  
Stop Crying]  
*Tadhana: Ito ang Labing Filipino—Reform Movement*  
*Episode* [Fate: This is the Filipino Race—Reform  
Movement Episode]  
*Inay* [Mother]
- 1978 *Mananayaw* [Dancer]  
*Ang Tatay Kong Nanay* [My Father Who's  
My Mother]  
*Gunising Ka Maruja* [Wake Up Maruja]  
*Hayop sa Hayop* [Animal to Animal]  
*Rubia Servios*
- 1979 *Inir* [Heat]  
*Ina, Kapatid, Anak* [Mother, Sibling, Daughter]  
*Jaguar*  
*Ina Ka ng Anak Mo* [You are the Mother of Your Child]
- 1980 *Nakaw na Pag-ibig* [Stolen Love]  
*Angela Markado*  
*Bona*
- 1981 *Burgis* [Bourgeois]  
*Kontrobersyal* [Controversial]  
*Hello, Young Lovers*  
*Binata si Mister, Dalaga si Misis* [Bachelor is the  
Husband, Maiden is the Wife]  
*Caught in the Act*
- 1982 *PX*  
*In Dis Corner* [In This Corner]  
*Palipat-lipat, Papalit-palit* [Fleeting, Changing]  
*Mother Dear*  
*Cain at Abel* [Cain and Abel]
- 1983 *Strangers in Paradise*  
*Hot Property*
- 1984 *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* [My Country: Grip the  
Knife]  
*Adultery* (Aida Macaraeg Case No. 7892)  
*Akin ang Iyong Katawan* [Mine is Your Body]
- 1985 *Miguelito, ang Batang Rebelde* [Miguelito, the Rebel Boy]  
*White Slavery*  
*Ano ang Kulay ng Mukha ng Diyos?* [What Color is  
the Face of God?]  
*Napakasakit, Kuya Eddie* [How Painful, Brother Eddie]
- 1987 *Maging Akin Ka Lamang* [If You Could Only Be Mine]  
*Pasan Ko ang Daigdig* [I Carry the World]
- 1988 *Tatlong Mukha ng Pag-ibig—“Ang Silid”* [Three Faces of  
Love—“The Room”]  
*Narutulog pa ang Diyos* [God is Still Asleep]

- 1989 *Macho Dancer*  
*Kaslan Mahubuganan ang Kasalanan?* [When can Sin be  
 Washed Away?]  
*Orapronabis* [Fight for Us]  
*Babangon Ako at Dudurugin Kita* [I Will Rise and Crush  
 You]
- 1990 *Kung Tapos na ang Kailanman* [When Eternity Ends]  
*Gumapang Ka sa Lusak* [Crawl in the Mire]  
*Hahamakin ang Lahat* [Will Despise Everything]  
*How are the Kids?*  
*Biktima* [Victim]  
*Ama, Bakit Mo Ako Pinabayaan?* [Father, Why did You  
 Forsake Me?]
- 1991 *Sa Kabila ng Lahat* [In Spite of Everything]  
*Kislap sa Dilim* [Sparkle in the Dark]  
*Makiusap Ka sa Diyos* [Plead with God]

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#### Notes to the Introduction

1. The number of twentieth-century texts testifying to the subsumption of human mediation by capital are too numerous to list. See, for example, Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971); Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 2002); Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983); Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin, (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1980); Régis Debray, *Media Manifestos*, trans. Erich Reuth (London and New York: Verso 1996); Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (London: Sage Publications, 1998); and my own work on the cinema. Each of these texts understands, in one way or another, mediation in the process of being subsumed and recodified by capital.

2. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 66.

3. Here I would like to link my work to writers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ranajit Guha, and Samir Amin.

4. See my forthcoming book, *The Cinematic Mode of Production* (University Press of New England).

5. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

6. See, for example, Jose Maria Sison, "Message to *Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista-Arkiitekto*," included as "appendix C," in Alice Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines 1970-1990* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001), 247-48. Sison calls for "overthrowing the art of the exploiting classes which is promoted by U.S. imperialism and its running dogs" (ibid., 247). He must have in mind